DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 131 RC 009 407

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TITLE The Unequal Exchange of Mutual Expectations: A Neglected Dimension of Rural Development.
PUB DATE Aug 76
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the World Congress of Rural Sociology (4th, Torun, Poland, August 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bureaucracy; *Change Agents; Cultural Differences; *Culture Conflict; *Developing Nations; *Economically Disadvantaged; Expectation; *Interaction Process Analysis; Life Style; *Rural Development; Social Change; Theories; Values
IDENTIFIERS World Congress of Rural Sociology (4th)

ABSTRACT

Chilean "asentados" and Mexican "ejidatarios" as observed between 1965-73 and 1972-76, respectively, constitute the basis for an analysis of the interaction between peasants and agents of social change in the rural development process. Encounters between peasants and functionaries can be conceived as ceremonies incorporating ritualistic forms (actions, gestures, movements, etc.), the times and places in which these forms occur, and the instruments of ceremony. Analysis of these ceremonial forms reveals social roles and acts which demonstrate that the peasant-functionary encounter is invariably under the functionary's control and constitutes an asymmetrical interaction, manifest in peasant ceremonies of submission. When these ceremonial forms of encounter are couched in the ideology of the dominant society's "truths", the "inferiority" of the peasant is construed as a question of lifestyle, mentality, and overall expectations. The conception of rural development programs as sets of expectations should provide opportunity for both the State and the peasants to develop a currency of expectations, but given the asymmetry of the peasant-functionary encounter, the peasant may engage in ceremonies of submission for purposes of maintaining his "underlife", while the State may create the illusion of change and use the bureaucracy to dampen peasant demands. (JC)

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ED128131

IV WORLD CONGRESS FOR RURAL SOCIOLOGY

TORÚN, POLAND
AUGUST 1976

Seminar 18. The Quality of Life: The Impact of Expectations on Development

THE UNEQUAL EXCHANGE OF MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS: A NEGLECTED DIMENSION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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RC009407

The idea that development presupposes or involves a radical change in the mentality of vast segments of Third World populations, principally peasants, has become a common place in theories and policies of social change. Despite terminological preferences -- some speak of changes in attitudes, values, norms or expectations; others of change in ethics, rationality, psychology and social character -- peasants have to end up changing their consumer habits, productive techniques and sexual customs. Furthermore, the very possibility of development has come to rest on the possibility of removing "the obstacle for development" that peasant mentality and life style represents.

This notion should be held suspect, if for no other reason, because it allocates the blame for underdevelopment, backwardness and dependency on its best identified victims. Faithful to its roots in the mythology of Imperialism and Protestant Ethic, this notion, in fact, proposes the "de-peasantization" of the world. In rural development programs it implies the resocialization, enculturation, acculturation, concientization, or operational conditioning, in one word, the unilateral manipulation of peasants through a variety of methods by a variety of agents of social change.

Social scientists have contributed their share of characterizations on peasants' undesirable traits. Fromm and Macoby (1970) for example, have studied psychological and socioeconomic factors that make up the Mexican peasant's social character. The transformation of this character is seen as crucial in an agrarian society given the general world tendency toward the utilization of advanced technologies. The question of the transformation of the social character of the remaining social groups is not raised, as if it were not a condition as indispensable for rural development as the transformation of peasantry. The humanist orientation claimed in this approach does not detract from the colonial[1] nature of the project. It merely desires that it be as painless as possible.

The search for alternatives to this conception cannot be conducted taking world tendencies as a point of departure (such as the utilization of advanced technologies, the inevitability of progress, growing complexities of social relations, and others of its kind). Unavoidably, these attempts will yield reified frameworks specifying equally reified lower order imperatives. The focus of this paper is the analysis of one of the processes of human interaction on which the whole project of rural change can be said to rest.

This is the encounter between peasants and those functionaries who act as "agents of social change". The social planner, the social worker, the rural extensionist, the family educator, the agricultural technician, the alfabetizer, are some of these types of functionaries. They are in charge of direct implementation, supervision and control of the process of rural development. Their role is conceived as merely instrumental, consisting in the delivery of services and application of professional and technical skills. The peasants are the subjects of social change and purported beneficiaries of this process.

For our current endeavor, the event of this encounter reveals the character and functions of rural development projects better than global formulations, political strategies, and rhetorical arrests. The empirical referent of our ideas are encounters between Chilean asentados, Mexican ejidatarios -- that is, peasants who have been granted an ownership of sorts over the lands they work -- and functionaries of the government bureaucracies of these countries, between 1965 and 1973 in Chile and from 1972 to date in Mexico. We do not claim that our empirical referents are representative of encounters of its kind around the world, but rather that they should be conceived as extreme cases. Extreme

because in these cases peasants have been given control of the land they work -- their main means of production. In situations where peasants are salaried or merely rent the land, one should expect an even wider social distance between peasants and functionaries.

The Encounter Between Peasants and Agents of Social Change

In their gestures, movements, dress and even smell, peasants and functionaries carry with them the messages of their respective life styles. The functionary manifests a superior education, the endowment of his position in the ranks of a governmental bureaucracy, and the control over visible signs of status, such as a vehicle, a tape recorder or some printed forms. Of no less importance is the functionary's monoply over the knowledge of an "etiquette"[2] to deal with superior beings and forces. These can be the viruses, vitamins and other biological forces which produce sickness and health in people, cattle and crops or the appropriate ways to obtain credit, pesticides and seed.

Thus, the asymetry of the encounter appears in the first observable characteristics of the actors. The functionary life style manifested in these traits -- an urban life style[3] more often than not is presented as a model towards which the peasant is expected to aspire. The functionary is the most immediate role model of

the "developed person," notwithstanding the inaccesibility of most of its elements for the peasant. On the other hand, the peasant's life style is not within the expectations of the functionary except in its most bucolic aspects sang by "humanists."

It is not the objective of this paper to describe the urban and rural traits exhibited by functionaries and peasants in their encounters. It is necessary to recognize, at the outset, that the asymetry of the encounter is founded in power differentials which support two different cosmologies, ways of knowing and social consciousness.

Ceremonial Forms of the Encounter

Encounters between peasants and functionaries are events which can be conceived as ceremonies that acquire ritualistic forms. In these forms, in addition to the actors, one can distinguish between the times and places in which the forms occur, the instruments of the ceremony and the ritual actions, gestures, movements, and speech themselves.[4]

Places and Times

The ceremony of the peasant-functionary encounter, just as magical, religious, political, juridical and familial ceremonies have especially propitious times and places. The rural home educator will prefer the

kitchen or shady spot outside the door, the extensionist will deliver his knowledge in sight of the crops, the credit agent will have his office, the health officer a dispensary, the educator a room where he can have a blackboard or electric power to project his slides, movies, etc. At any rate, what makes the time and place propitious in all cases, is that they are chosen to make possible or facilitate the exercise of the functionary's skill or technique.

The Actors

More often than not, the functionary plays the part of the officiator, while peasants assume the role of participant spectators. The officiator's role will take a variety of forms appropriate to the professional goals of the functionary. Dress style, in addition to establish socioeconomic differences, serves to indicate the positions of the actors in the encounter. Shoe and huarache, woolen trouser or blue jean and cotton pant, length of skirt, color of the blouse, hair length, etc., all have the function of creating the ceremonial stage and defining the ceremonial roles. In the same way that white collar serves to characterize urban bureaucrats, sport and peasant style shirts and American style jeans identify the agrarian functionary in Chile or in Mexico. Actors carry the titles and appropriate forms of address.

The functionary will be called "Engineer", "Doctor", "Architect", "Licenciado" or whatever his professional degree and expertise show him to be. In Mexico, Chile, Colombia and other Latin American countries it is frequent to find that peasants are addressed by functionaries as "Don" or "Dona" or using the coloquial "tu" while the peasant addresses them in the impersonal "Usted".

The instruments

These can be as simple as a manila folder with a few blank pages and a notebook or as complicated as a bundle of educational pamphlets, tape recorders, slide projectors, pick-up trucks, jeeps or institutional cars. These instruments are as foreign to the peasant as are the chalices, incense burners and other paraphernalia in magical or religious rites. Yet the former are as familiar to the functionary as the latter are to the officiant sorcerer or priest.

A privileged type of instrument are radio and television as used in rural development programs. Great hopes are placed on these media for their purported persuasive potential, given that the radio (especially transistor radios) have become familiar objects in peasant life. Nevertheless, the characteristics of these mass media, the cost of more sophisticated radio sets other than portable, battery operated units and

t. v. sets, and the technology required for their operation make them as inaccessible to the peasant as magical potions and ritual formulas therefore leaving him in the passive role of spectator, learner or trainee. The institutional vehicle also has a place of privilege. In addition to being an undisputable status symbol, it allows the functionary spatial mobility to be able to reach the peasant in his home, in the fields, in a local bar, or wherever may be necessary. This mobility is severely restricted for the peasant.

The Acts

These include gestures, bodily motions, distances, speech, etc. The ceremonial words include the functionary's jargon which the peasant must slowly learn: "development, community organization, society, function, hygiene, consciousness, interests", etc. It also includes those expressions which the functionary must utilize to maintain a minimal empathy with the peasant. But it is not the esoteric nature of some words what is crucial to the ceremony. Well trained or experienced functionaries will be able to communicate with peasants in their own language, and "translate" their messages to make them adequate to "the intellectual level of the peasant". What is crucial is that speech, verbal or written, delivered by the functionary through radio or television or in a face

to face interaction, has an instrumental role. Speech becomes the instrument of command, persuasion, concientization, extension, or whatever might be the case. By contrast, the peasant's relation to his own words is that of truth. In his speech the peasant furnishes information, agrees or disagrees, formulates demands. If as Barthes has suggested the essence of myth lies in the instrumental relation between words and speaker, one can see the essentially mythological function of agents of social change: the creation of new myths to replace traditional ones.

In summary, we find that the times and places, enacted roles and acts in which the encounter between peasants and functionaries acquire a ceremonial form, fall under the functionary's control. In this way, the asymetry of interaction is reinforced and expressed most eloquently.

There are occasions, however, in which the interaction takes place in peasant ceremonial contexts. Functionaries are often placed in the situation of accepting invitations and attending peasant ceremonies where they are to play the role of guest of honor, godfather, or sponsor. On these occasions it is the peasant who sets up the time and place and other ceremonial rules. Thus, for example, functionaries are often forced not to

leave a table until a drinking ceremony is finished, or to accept food and drink which they dislike and consider non hygienic. Any agent with some field experience will have a repertoire of anecdotes of these occasions. In them, to gain acceptance, the functionary must abide the rules and sanctions which make the crucial peasants notion of "dignity" and "respect".

But even in these latter cases where the peasant is in control one can observe the asymetric character of the interaction. In exchange for dominance over the functionary or for prestige and recognition, the peasant must expend a high proportion of his income in the money to buy drink and food or in the animals he sacrifices for the meal. A meal like the ones offered by peasants to functionaries in middle bureaucratic ranks can exhaust the annual ceremonial fund of a peasant family.[5]

These ceremonial forms could be conceptualized in the sociological terms of role expectations, attitude differentials or in terms of systematic constraints, values and norms. This reduction, though, denies the fact that these ceremonies are the events in which the historical experience of development processes acquires its form for peasants and functionaries. In the Chilean agrarian reform experience under the administrations of Frei and Allende, ex landowners and landlords manifested stronger feelings of dispair towards the peasants'

refusal to engage in the ceremonial manifestations of submission than to the fact that their lands had been expropriated. A landowner whose lands were expropriated and returned to him by the military who rule that country since September, 1973, told one of the authors: "Yes, I got my land back, but my people are not the same. Before, they did not know how to hate. Today, they show no respect for me or my family."

From another perspective the shape of these ceremonies of the encounter could be attributed to the functionaries' social sensitivity, committments or degree of training. One would thus expect that functionaries committed to the political interests of the peasants, or more sensitive to the subtleties of human interaction would not engage in ceremonies of submission. This would be misleading on at least two counts. In the first place, the problem does not consist on passing judgment on individual functionaries. It is irrelevant in the context of rural development programs. Secondly, such interpretation would direct our attention to the ideal elements of the interaction in detriment to the objective conditions in which the interaction takes place. These conditions are those of inequality and power differentials which are expressed and reinforced in the ceremonial forms we have analyzed.

Ideological Formations

The key characteristic of the ideological formations in which the ceremonial forms of the encounter between peasants and functionaries acquires a meaning that they are presented as self evident truths, as the manifestations of world tendencies or as rationality itself. Thus, the social origins, and, the status to be granted to rural development ideas among other things, is consistently obscured. In this way the inferiority of the peasant is construed not only as a political and economic question but also as a question of life style, mentality and overall expectations.

Agents of change and the institutional bureaucracies that support them, claim a professional, political, and administrative monoply over rural planning and development, setting aside standards of what is valuable and desirable, notwithstanding parallel claims of active participation by the subjects of change not only in the benefits but also in the process itself.

In the rural situation the power of the agent of change is enhanced in the interactional process of the encounter, since it is through him that the subject of change, the peasant, receives credit, training, seeds, advice on family planning, etc. And it is through him that the peasant acquires the models for his better life as defined by planners, scientists, leaders and all

those whose mere position in society by virtue of education or simple power gives them claim to such definition. Access and aspiration for food, housing, health, education and work are slowly patterned in an aspirational life style so defined and personally portrayed by the agent of change.

From the point of view of policy planning, these scientifically interpreted basic necessities are translated into: calories and proteins, type and quality of housing, number of persons per room, type of floor, potable water, drainage, electricity, total and infant mortality rate, morbidity rate, number of hospitals, medical doctors, paramedic personnel, years of schooling, retention rates, number of schools and teachers, among others. As Illich (1970) has pointed out: "Once basic needs have been translated by a society into demands for scientifically produced commodities, poverty is defined by standards which the technocrats can change at will."

The Unequal Exchange of Mutual Expectations

The calculus as to the changes in peasant mentality should be conceived more appropriately as expectations on the part of dominant groups concerning the peasantry. The salient characteristic of these expectations is that they are supported by the apparatus of the State and

carried out to its ceremonial level by servants of that apparatus. But still despite the fact that they are seldom recognized as such, they are ideas of the future when made a matter of choice: expectations.

The conception of rural development programs as sets of expectations allows us to see the interaction between peasants and functionaries as a complex of meaningful conduct. Otherwise we would have to understand it only in terms of the individual's motivations and experiential context and assume that these are determined by stable properties in the environment or by inmutable social conditions.

Thus, in a very real sense, expectations supported by the state apparatus, and peasants' expectations, are far more than simple states of mind. They represent a true currency in the process of rural development. This idea follows from our previous analysis if one asks what does the peasant obtain in return for his ritual (and real) submission? What does the State, and the groups which control it obtain in exchange for the energy and resources involved? In the case of the peasant it is easy to see that his encounter with the bureaucratic apparatus allows him the crystalization of expectations for a better life. Or, one could interpret the peasant's engaging in ceremonies of submission as an effective way

to go about their "underlife"[6] as unmolested as possible. The State's efforts can be seen as efficient ways to create the illusion of change and use the bureaucracy to dampen the peasantry's demands.[7]

NOTES

[1]Gonzalez Casanova (1963) and Stavenhagen (1965) have utilized the notion of internal colonialism. Rural development projects can be conceived in this context.

[2]Veblen (1953) has seen the power of priests as emerging from the monopoly over a supernatural etiquette. This idea can be extended to other occupational groups that claim a professional status based on their superior or esoteric knowledge.

[3]The most important agricultural colleges in Mexico and Chile for instance, El Colegio Nacional de Agricultura de Chapingo and La Escuela de Agricultura de la Universidad de Chile, have better than 90% of their students as urbanites.

[4]See Mauss and Hubert (1968) who follow this distinction.

[5]The inequality manifested here can be traced in a variety of other elements. Functionaries are paid per diem, overtime. The peasant's time is seldom valued in economic terms. Moreover, the interaction between peasants and functionaries takes place during working hours but the peasant must put his work aside to talk to functionaries.

[6]See Erving Goffman's Asylums.

[7]See Petras (1970).

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